

*Molly Reid Library*

# HISTORIC ADDRESS

At The

Seventy-Fifth Anniversary

Of The

## CENTRAL CHURCH

In Derry, N. H.

By The

Rev. Jesse G. MacMurphy

August 4, 1912



Reprinted in Book Form, Nov. 1924



## THE BEGINNINGS

---

In giving a brief historic sketch of the founding of this church seventy-five years ago, it may be of interest to look at the condition of the town. This present township of Derry had been a part of the original township of Londonderry. Derry was set off from the older township of Londonderry ten years before the organization of this church. The settlement of this Colony was begun here in 1718, and in the following year homesteads were laid out to the settlers, and recorded as being in Nutfield. Owing to questions of lawful title to the land, a Royal Charter was obtained in 1722, covering the land claimed by the settlers, and naming it Londonderry, instead of Nutfield. The earlier settlements were made in the eastern part of the town, and there the first church was built, and graveyard laid out. The foundations of that building were laid approximately where the East Derry Church is now. As the western part of the town became settled, the members of the church began to see the necessity for another place of meeting and worship. As early as 1729, services were begun on the top of a hill, three miles west of the First

Church. A building was erected, and a second graveyard laid out. The graveyard remains, as the final resting place of the bodies of some of the towns most illustrious dead. For a period of thirty years this building was used as a house of worship for the westerly part of the town. During that period, and after the second graveyard continued to be used for burial. The chief benefactor of the two churches first organized in the town of Londonderry, and of the Academy which bears his name, is buried there. The first couple married in Londonderry are buried there. There are the graves of Revolutionary soldiers. This locality not having given complete satisfaction, the second church erected a substantial building nearly a mile beyond, on more accessible ground, and laid out a third graveyard. That building was, calculated to accommodate a large number of families. For about as long a period as this church in Derry has stood here, that building stood there in Londonderry, and was occupied constantly for worship. The congregations were large, and some eminent ministers occupied the high pulpit, and under the pendant sounding board, expounded the scriptures seriously and solemnly, to well filled box pews on the

floor, and to galleries that extended around three sides of the building. Any except the older generation of today can scarcely realize the seriousness and gravity with which the ordinances of the two sacraments were formerly administered. The preliminary examinations, for admission, and tokens of fellowship for participation in the communion, were matters, of solemn obligation. From that congregation in Londonderry and from the congregations of the First Church in Derry, the movement began which resulted in the organization of this church.

### Other Considerations.

Already at the end of seventy-five years in the west parish, there was a feeling, that the locality was not yet satisfactory for the situation of the building. For in the meanwhile a place of worship and meeting had been built in the Aiken Range, much nearer to the old first church; and still there were other members of the west parish, who wanted the building farther west. In this dilemma, the proposition to build two houses of worship, with permanent organizations, became a satisfactory solution of the difficulties. The people who lived in the High Range, and beyond the latest



building in Londonderry would be accommodated by a meeting house further west, and those intermediate between that Range and the English Range would find a building in the Lower Village more convenient and quite within their reach.

Several events had taken place in Derry Lower Village, to make this the most convenient locality for the erection of a new house of worship. Before the town of Londonderry was divided, two schools had grown up, side by side, in this community; and these two schools became the attractive features of a growing center of business and education. Here there developed a girls school, and a boys school, of such promise, that each of them had a small staff of teachers and each acquired a building, and patronage sufficient for future encouragement. The Female Seminary stood on these premises, and was here when this church was organized, and this building erected in 1837. The boys school became an academy, after the manner of other New England literary institutions. Derry Village had other qualifications for fitness to become the rallying place, where the least sacrifice would have to be made to accomplish the best results. Here was a mill privilege or several of them, and water power with

plenty of business. The young ladies and young men finally united in one institution would be benefitted by the church, and the church would be the better for some closer relations with the schools. The plan of placing this church in the Lower Village, immediately enlisted the support of a large number of people, some of whom were not members of any society; as naturally many persons may approve, and assist a movement for the good of a community, even when they cannot or may not accept the conditions of membership in a Church. When a call was made, to see how many people were desirous of organizing a church in this place, at once it became evident that the movement was in full accord with the wishes of a considerable proportion of the residents of this vicinity. Those who took part in the organization of the church here, and made plans for building a suitable meeting house, at this point by the side of the Female Seminary and near the Pinkerton Academy, were deeply interested in the welfare of the village and the schools.

Here in a growing village, within easy reach of the settlers, and their families of the Ayers Range, Aiken Range, and Alds Hill and the Turnpike, would be the ideal

locality for permanent occupation. But here was to be no burial place, the associations of the past were to be kept sacred and tender. With their griefs and bereavements, the members of this new society would join with their fathers in a common cause of mourning, and at last be buried with them in the old places.

### Sources of Information.

The sources of information, for a history of the movements, that led to the organization of this church, are to be found in various public and private records. The foundations were not laid so long ago, as to be lost to the memory of some of our oldest citizens. There are living men and women who saw the laying of these foundations, who were present at the framing and raising of this house of worship, and heard the first prayers in this place of divine intercession and communion. And there are among the living some few persons, who can remember the last services in that other places in Londonderry of hallowed associations, where for seventy-five years the faithful gathered. Persons may say what is the use, what advantage is gained by recalling the names of those faithful servants of the Lord, who



ministered so diligently and earnestly to the generations that have preceded us? Observe.

In that other place of worship one pastor served for a period of thirty-five years. With what tenderness his name was spoken in the homes of our childhood. He was a true priest to his people, in joy and sorrow, in childhood and old age, and put them, through their catechisms, with steadfast regard for the salvation of their immortal souls and their Christian edification and growth in grace. Such was the training of those who engaged in the founding of this society in Derry Village. The traditions of the building of this house of prayer have not yet gone from the memory of the living. A few years after this society was formed, the pastor of the oldest and first church in town wrote a history of Londonderry, of great value now. He too was a true priest to his people, and was so spoken of by them, in the joys and sorrows of a long and faithful service. Forty years he ministered to that congregation. And then he departed this life, in the midst of an unusually busy season of labors with three services on Sunday, his book unfinished; but his works were not lost. His manuscript was published. In that excellent

history of civil and ecclesiastic movements in this town, we have much information, concerning the beginnings of this society, and very much of the previous movements of locating the place of worship permanently.

A few years ago there was published another history, with maps and illustrations that gives a rather interesting account of the settlement of Nutfield, and shows where every family was located. In this book of Nutfield are full accounts of the several societies in town, the dates of their formation, lists of their pastors names, and duration of their terms of service. Beside, we have in this book, excellent articles on the growth and development of these societies, with numerous relative pictures.

From time to time, there have been hand-books of this church, published with brief sketches of organization, constitution, articles of faith, and covenant, and full list of all names of members, with times of their admission. Hundreds of printed copies are in circulation, and easily accessible to every interested inquirer.

There is a book of "Records of the First Congregational Society in Derry." There is also a book of the "Records of the First Congregational Church in Derry." for information.

## Society Records.

Some mention perhaps, of the contents of the book of Records of the First Congregational Society of Derry, may be made with propriety, as only a few persons have had access to its pages of history. The sessions of the Society have been frequent, from the first occupation of its being called together, and the records of its meetings and transactions occupy the pages of a large volume. Indeed several books have been used to record the business of seventy five years of active service.

Some of the earlier records have been copied, and transferred to new books, for a more convenient and durable remembrance.

The Divine Master took a familiar figure to represent the unity of His Church, and the relation existing between Himself and His disciples. "I am the Vine and ye are the branches." The successive developments of the natural vine are all of them new departures in place, and time, and cultivation; but the identity of the Vine is witnessed in all of the branches. They were not a different people, who came together seventy-five years ago, and organized this First Congregational Society. They were identical with the First and Second Parish in Derry and Londonderry. And they had not es-

entirely changed, through some sudden emotion, or caprice; such societies were being organized in other towns, and the times seemed to demand the formation of this Society, here, in this literary and growing village.

The men who assembled near this spot in Derry Village, on July 12, 1837, to draw up a constitution and by-laws, for the regulation of this new Society, were men of mature judgment, well grounded in their convictions, as to the good of this community, and the righteousness of the cause. These men, with a few exceptions, came from the First and Second Parishes of Derry and Londonderry, for the towns were already separated with a line of demarcation between them.

According to the Records of the First Congregational Society in Derry, the first meeting was held in the building, that then stood a few feet from where this church now stands. In the record, it is called the Female Seminary. The school building was two stories in height, with suitable rooms for classes above and below. It is scarcely necessary to say, this building was moved into the center of the village, and is now used as a store, and residence combined. The first meeting in the Female

seminary was attended by a substantial body of men and they drew up and adopted a constitution and by-laws, for the government of this Society, agreeably with the laws of the State of New Hampshire in relation thereto. There were eleven articles of agreement in the constitution. They relate to calling an annual meeting, choice of officers, duty of clerk, duty of treasurer, duties of these directors, posting warrants of meetings, voluntarily subscriptions, compensation for officers, signing by-laws, right of voting, and amendments. Sixty-two men and three women appear to have ratified and approved that constitution and by-laws, by signing their names thereto, on the same day: as certified to by the testimony of the clerk. Why three women signed their names, and whether there were other women present at the meeting, is not clear. They were well-known women, all three of them were prominent and highly esteemed in the community. One of them was a teacher, well beloved by a host of friends.

These sixty-two men could not have been single, moreover there were numerous other women in the community, but it is evident, they were not needed at this time, to give weight to the movement. These sixty-five



names would be necessary to this sketch, if time permitted and they were not otherwise accessible. One single entry only will be taken from the Society Records, as we read, "July 12 1837. The gentlemen whose names are affixed to the foregoing constitution and by-laws of the First Congregational Society in Derry met by agreement at the Female Seminary in Derry and proceeded as follows:

Chose Robert Hall, Esq., moderator.

Chose Thomas Carlton, Jr., clerk, who was duly sworn to the faithful discharge of **the duties of his office.**

Voted to form a society and assumed the name of the First Congregational Society in Derry.

Voted to adopt the foregoing constitution and by-laws.

Chose Samuel Adams, Esq., treasurer.

Chose Abel F. Hildreth, Nathaniel Aiken, Leonard Hale, Samuel Adams, William Choate, Joseph Gregg, George W. Pinkerton, Charles Redfield, Nathaniel Parker, Alexander MacMurphy, and Robert Hall a committee to appraise and sell the pews in the meeting house, and superintend the dedication of the same. Voted to adjourn without day.

Thomas Carlton, Jr. Clerk. W. A

These records have been copied into a newer book in the fine clear hand of a late deacon of the church, and clerk of this Society. These few names need no comment, because so many people of this village, and society, have already been made acquainted with the general traditions of the house they occupied, and the chief characteristics of their daily lives.

### **Church Records.**

By reference to the book of Records of the First Congregational church in Derry, it will be seen that the Church was preliminarily organized four days earlier than the Society, and duly elected a chairman, secretary, and committee of three members.

The third person of the committee to convene a council was my father's uncle, Benjamin MacMurphy. About the last year of his life in the English Range, I visited him, and great aunt Susan. He was a pious and good man. I recollect that he showed me his copy of the New Testament, and told me he had read it through twenty-seven times. On the inside of the cover he had marked with a pencil each reading thus 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 2. I was greatly impressed by this token of his love for the scriptures as

pecially the New Testament. (I wonder if that New Testament is in existence, and in the possession of any relative or friend of the family.)

### To Convene a Council of Churches.

These names being given in the hand-book, or mantel, of the church, it seems quite unnecessary to repeat them here. The council was convened at the house of the Principal of Pinkerton Academy in Derry, on the 3d day of August 1837. The Council consisted of the Pastor and one delegate from the first church in Derry.

The pastor and one Delegate from the Church in Londonderry. The pastor and one Delegate from the church in Chester. The pastor and one Delegate from the church in Hampstead. The pastor from the church in Bedford. The Pastor and one Delegate from the church in Wingham. The Pastor of the church in Pelham. There were forty persons here who were members of the First church in Derry and who presented regular letters of dismission and recommendation to the new Church. There were twenty-three persons, who were members of the church of Londonderry, and who presented regular letters of recommendation, and one member of the church in Pel

ham with letters. These sixty-four persons desired to unite with the new Church in this village on the day of its organization. The council approved of the organization of the new church, in the chosen few words, which are quoted from the book of Records of the First Congregational Church in Derry: "That there is propriety in its being done for the following reasons: Not on account of any disaffection, or alienation of feelings between the members, and either of the churches in Derry or Londonderry, and their pastors, or between one another, nor on account of any disagreement in respect to the doctrine of the gospel, but on account of the increasing population of the Village, the existence of two Literary Institutions, the importance of bringing the members of the institutions more fully under the influence of the preaching of the gospel, that the benefit of another Sabbath school may be enjoyed, that the brethren and sisters, and the population in the vicinity, may enjoy increased facilities for religious edification, and that the cause of evangelical religion in general may be promoted, and it is the earnest desire and hope of the council, that the formation of a new Church will not cause, or occasion, any unpleasant feeling, or jealousy, or strife. On

motion, voted that the Council proceed to organize the above named individuals into a Church, to be denominated 'The First Congregational Church in Derry' and so the act was accomplished on the same day. The confession of Faith adopted and a form of covenant agreed upon, the Council proceeded to the new meeting house where the Church was constituted with preaching and prayer.

### **The Meeting.**

It would be interesting, and instructive, to review the pastoral care of this church, and say a word of just praise and commendation for each of the seven pastors and the deacons who have ministered to the spiritual wants of this household of the faith. But the average length of service is a sufficient warrant for mutual congratulations, that the Lord has been mindful of His own, and the flock has been fed. The Shepherd has not suffered them to want. He has made them to lie down in green pastures. He has led them beside the still waters. He made them to walk in the paths of righteousness for his names sake. And when they walked through the valley of the shadow of death, He was with them. His rod and his staff comforted them. This



Church was fortunate in the calling of a good man at the very beginning. The first to minister to this people was a young man, Mr. Pliny B. Day, just graduated from the Andover Theological Seminary. The ordination and installation of the first pastor occurred on the 4th day of October 1837.

It was a grand occasion in Derry Village when that function took place. The Council convened consisted of the following pastors and delegates: Rev. Edward L. Parker, Pastor, Elder Joseph Jenness, Delegate, from the Church in Derry. Rev. John R. Adams, Pastor, Elder Joshua Gordon, Delegate from the Church in London-derry. Rev. Jonathan Clement, Pastor, Bro. Nathaniel F. Emerson, Delegate, from the Church in Chester. (Rev. John M. C. Bartley, Pastor, Bro. James Calef, Delegate, from the Church in Hampstead. Rev. Daniel Fitz, Pastor, Bro. John Baker, Delegate, from the Church in Ipswich. **Elder John Filsom, Delegate from the Church in West Chester.** Bro. Pliny Day, Delegate, from the church in South Hadley. Rev. Calvin Cutler, Pastor, Elder Jonathan Cochran, Delegate, from the church in Windham. Rev. John Keep, Pastor, Bro. Nehemiah Hutchinson, Delegate, from the church in Pelham. Rev. Lorenzo S. Langs

troth, Pastor, Bro. Thomas Foster, Delegate, from the church in Adover. Rev. Artemus Boies, Pastor, from a Church in Boston. Rev. Thomas Savage, from the church in Bedford. Rev. Charles P. Russell, Pastor, from the church in Candia.

The usual examination of the candidates was sustained and about half past eleven o'clock that day the ordination proceeded.

Rev. Mr. Langtroth made the introductory prayer.

Rev. Mr. Boies preached the sermon.

Rev. Mr. Savage made the ordaining prayer.

Rev. Parker gave the charge.

Rev. Mr. Adams gave the Right Hand of Fellowship.

Rev. Mr. Clement gave the address to the people.

Rev. Mr. Fitz made the concluding prayer. Benediction by the Pastor, the Rev. Pliny B. Day. Thus was begun a pastorate that happily continued fourteen years, with two exceptions the longest of service here. The Rev. E. G. Parsons served eighteen years and the Rev. H. B. Putnam sixteen years.

## And The People.

In reviewing the events of seventy-five years, there will arise certain reflections concerning the changes, which have taken place in the families, that originally gathered in this house of prayer. When any man takes up the Manual and looks over the early lists of members of this church, and sees the names of twenty persons of his own family, not one of whom is now in the land of the living, and reflects that except for himself this family name is blotted out of existence in the town, he is likely to feel rather lonely. It is a solemn reflection, that when his church was young, and had gathered from the east and the west, among the members were so many near relatives, his parents, and uncles, and aunts, and even grand parents and great uncles, and great aunts, that have since gone the way of all flesh, and left none behind to bear him company! No man, or woman, was ever connected with this church, who does not remember the happy impressions made by the Sabbath school. You may remember that the Council which organized this Church, in their first report urged the benefit of another Sabbath school. While it does not pertain to the

proper history of the church, yet it does enter into a proper appreciation of the services of the elderly members of the church; to say the teachers of the Sabbath School, and even the attendants of classes, have never considered age as barring them from them the privilege, or the duty, of studying the scriptures. Naturally, in looking back through the years of Church and School, one becomes impressed with the features of old age and faithful gray-headed men and women, loved long since and lost awhile.

The people come and go but the church goes on forever. The value of an Institution consists in the usefulness and quality of the men and women who have been influenced by its teachings. The fact should not be overlooked, that this church and its solid principles of elderly instruction have made their impressions on generations elsewhere in the world. New England has been famous for the impressions made by those, who have removed from this and similar societies and institutions, to other parts of the country.

New England is famous for a peculiar conscience, and it has become known abroad. The reason assigned for the growth of this peculiar feature is, that here as

elsewhere, the establishment of churches and Sabbath Schools, at frequent intervals, has been the rule of practice. There is a sentiment that prevails respecting the duty we owe to the coming generation, in sustaining such opportunities of mutual helpfulness in understanding the word of God, the holy scriptures. There is a certainty, that however insignificant our individual contribution to the teachings of inspired record, yet the mite is on the right side of the final reckoning. The keeping of this anniversary reminds us of the reality of eternal convictions, as to the value of right living, that the reckoning may not be unpleasant, when those worthies of a former generation shall meet again with us; the lost shall be found; the visions of life realized, in the fulness of a certain faith, a reasonable hope and charity abounding toward the whole world "So long Thy power has blest me, sure it still will lead me on"

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent,  
 till The night is gone;  
 And with the morn those angels faces smile,  
 Which I have loved long since, and lost  
 awhile."







